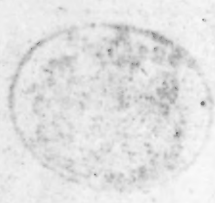


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DR PRAT'S
SERMON
PREACH'D Before the
Lord-Mayor

At St. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL,
Sept. 17th 1704.



Parsons Mayor.

*Cur. Special. tent. in festo Scti. Michael
Archangeli ss. die Veneris xxix^o die
Septembris, 1704. Annoq; R. R^{na}.
ANNÆ, Angl. &c. Tertio.*

THIS Court doth Desire the
Reverend Dr. Prat to Print
his Sermon Preach'd at the *Cathedral-
Church of St. Paul, London, on Sunday*
the 17th of this present Month of
September, before the Right Honour-
able the Lord-Mayor and Aldermen
of this City.



Asbhurst.

RETURNS of MERCY.

A
S E R M O N

PREACH'D Before the
RIGHT HONOURABLE
T H E

Lord-Mayor

A N D
ALDERMEN of LONDON,

At St. *PAUL'S* CATHEDRAL,
Sept. 17th 1704.

By *SAMUEL PRAT*, D. D. Clerk of
the Closet to the *QUEEN'S* MAJESTY.

L O N D O N,

Printed by *J. L.* for *Henry Bonwicke*, at the *Red Lion*,
in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*, MDCC IV.

RECEIVED

SEP 19 1964

RIGHT HONORABLE

100-100-100

ALDERMAN of London

25 JUL 1964

By SAMUEL PRATT, D.D. Clerk of

SERMON

PREACH'D Before the
Lord-Mayor.

ZECHAR. i. 16.

(The Former Part of the Verse.)

*Therefore, thus saith the LORD,
I am return'd to Jerusalem with
Mercies:—*

I Take in [*Therefore,*] the Particle of Inference, to shew that the fore-going Words were the Occasion of these in my Text: for the Ill-Nature of the Heathen, who, as they were Authors of the Oppression, rejoyced at any Affli-
B ction

ction of God's People, was one Occasion of the sudden Return of God's Mercy. *I am very sore displeased with the Heathen that are at ease, for I was but a little displeased, (1. e.) with Jerusalem, and they [the Heathen] helped forward the Affliction. Therefore thus saith the Lord, I am return'd to Jerusalem with Mercies.*

In the Beginning of the Chapter GOD ALMIGHTY is Covenanting with Jerusalem for Mercies. *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts, Ver. 3. re-iterating the Attribute (saith St. Jerom) to make 'em sensible of his Power; Then having offer'd Terms of Accommodation, He fore-warns 'em, Ver. 4. of such an Obduracy in Sin, as that of their Fore-fathers was. Be ye not as your Fathers unto whom the former Prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not bear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord.*

The

The Fifth Verse, by putting them in mind of the Transitoriness of all Things *temporal*, recalls 'em from a Relyance upon any thing but GOD the *Eternal*, His Truth, and His Power; *Your Fathers, where are they? and the Prophets, do they live for ever?* Which, in the 6th Verse, their Fathers were at last obliged to acknowledge, though against their Will. But my Words and my Statutes which I commanded my Servants the Prophets, did they not take hold of your Fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

Then follows a Vision, and so we come to my Text, *I am return'd to Jerusalem with Mercies*: Which Words offer to our Consideration Three Particulars.

First: GOD ALMIGHTY seems to absent Himself sometimes from those for whom he hath great Blessings in Store; this the Text *supposes*. The Text hath

regard to the Difficulties and Distresses which the Jewish Church had for a while groan'd under, by means of a Persecuting and Tyrannical Nimrod, a King of Babylon, the Pleasure of whose Life had been to hunt down Souls: For if there had not been an *absenting* or withdrawing Himself from his People, the Word *Return* had been improper.

II. *Secondly*: That such absenting of Himself from those whom He loves, is but for a while, as seems best to his Goodness and Wisdom; this the Text asserts, *I am Return'd*.

III. *Thirdly*: That when He doth Return, 'tis with all the Tenders of Love and Compassion; of Eternal Good-Will and Infinite Love; for this the Text *Implies* by the Word *Mercy*, *I am returned in Mercy*.

I. *First then*: GOD ALMIGHTY absents himself sometimes from those whom He loves: By absenting Himself, I mean only

only the withdrawing His Countenance or Sun-shine of His Favour, when the Clouds of Adversity, or Trouble either Spiritual or Temporal, outward or inward, obscure or sit uneasie upon His chosen Servants; for at such time (as *Job* phrases it) He seems to *hide his Face from them.*

But One Thing must be premised, *to wit*, That they are not always Sufferers whom we suppose to be so, many an one of God's dearest Children, are supposed (by those that love to see it, and to help forward the Affliction) to be troubled on every side, and distressed too, whereas their Trust and Relyance upon God, Supports and Comforts 'em to that degree, that they themselves feel least of that which their Enemies rejoyce in seeing.

Afflictions in this Life are like Eclipses of Celestial Bodies, the noblest Planet never suffers any, for when we say the Sun is Eclipsed, 'tis we are more properly so, we want its chearful Light and Influences, whilst he himself is not diminished one Ray. — The Moon

is

is sometimes really Eclips'd, and labours under the Want of a borrow'd Light.

Thus Divinest Constitutions never suffer; they only, whose Life and Happiness depends upon 'em, as upon Second Causes, are concerned when they think their Life-giving Sun is any ways obscur'd, whilst the greatest Sufferer in our Opinion, is most happy and easie in its self. The Lunar Populace are more really affected by that Obscurity which can never hurt a Being, placed so near Divinity; and so great and illustrious as that is, who hath learn'd to despise the World, or at least hath no other Business with it, but to do it good.

Supposing nevertheless it be so, that such an one hath been for some time, or may be obscur'd; Then the

First Proposition must be granted, That GOD ALMIGHTY doth sometimes seem to absent himself from those whom he best Loves. This is too evident to need any Proof, *Joseph*, and *David*, and even the *Son of GOD* Himself, had more than an ordinary Share of this Worlds Frowns.

Frowns. A great Part of their Life was an uneasy Pilgrimage: They found themselves often exposed to Popular Censure and Affronts, to many Uneasinesses and Hazards; and that which perhaps was one of the severest Dispensations of God's Providence towards 'em, the Animadversions and Reproaches of those that were nearest and dearest to 'em.

That God doth sometimes deal so with those whom he loves, needs at this time no further Proof; but then why he doth so, may deserve a little our Consideration.

The Reasons for it may respect: *First*, God Himself. *Secondly*, Those whom He so loves. *Thirdly*, The rest of the World.

First: GOD ALMIGHTY may permit it so to be for his own Divine Sake, That He may be glorified by all that happens to the Children of Men: That the Wise Man may see he hath no Reason to Glory in his Wisdom, nor the Mighty Man in his Strength, nor the Honourable Man in his Honour; but
that

E.

that all things by GOD's Providence come a-like sometimes to all; and that he being the sole Proprietor and Disposer of all things above and below; He puts down one and sets up another; the greatest Monarchs upon Earth being in His Hand but as the Dust of a Balance; and that he makes use of such, only but to raise or depress, or to set even the Scales of the World. When therefore he augments the Power of cruel Tyrants, and lifts 'em up with Variety of Successes, when on the other side he sometimes depresseth the meek-spirited, and makes their solid Virtues stoop to all appearance of disadvantage, insomuch that Justice and Equanimity, Temperance, Goodness and Piety seem to be unavailable Qualifications for Happiness; then comes a blessed Turn of Affairs, and GOD ALMIGHTY glorifies himself by a Reverse of Dispensations, shewing that he himself hath the sole right of being absolute; and that when he who might justly have dash'd both to pieces against one another by the Prerogative of a Sovereign Creator,

Creator, whereby all Creatures which He made out of Earth, ought to be but as so many Vessels in the Hand of a *Potter*; He breaks the strong to pieces, and scatters them as Dust before the Wind, again, He exalteth the Humble and Meek, and without any Distinction of Age or Sex, Illustrates daily that Divine Maxim, That *his Strength is perfected in Weakness*. To GOD therefore, and to Him alone, be all the Honour and Glory.

Secondly: In respect of those whom He Loves, He may sometimes afflict 'em either by way of Admonition or Tryal: By way of *Admonition*, he *Chastens* Heb. 12, 6. *those whom he loves*; and *tho' no Chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless: afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

GOD is that Wise and Tender Physician who never administers any uneasie Medicine but when He sees there is Occasion for it; He is not subject
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to the Frailties of Humour, Ignorance, or Passion, whereby all other Professors err in their Practice; but all the Dispensations of his Providence, are the Results of Divine Wisdom and Unchangeable Love, therefore they ought most to suspect themselves who have the least Share of severe Favours. *Magna Ira est* (saith St. Jerome) *quando peccantibus non Irascitur Deus*, 'Tis an Instance of GOD's greatest Anger to any one, if he never at any time appears to be angry; They seem to be given over, whom GOD never afflicts, where He takes no Care he disowns, for

Heb. xii. 8. *if ye be without Chastisement, (saith the Author to the Hebrews,) whereof all are partakers, then are ye Bastards and not Sons.*

Or else GOD ALMIGHTY afflicts by way of Tryal, when he designs to make Tryal of the Patience and Vertue, Faith and Hope, and not least of all, of the Charity of any one of his Servants; of this we have many Instances among the *Patriarchs* of old, and the *Jews* in the Time of the *Maccabees*,

Maccabees, the Primitive Christians, and even in all Ages of those, who, as St. James encouraged us to do, counted it all Joy when they fell into such sort Jam. i. 2.
of temptations; reckon'd that all the Sufferings of this present life are not Rom. viii. 18.
worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them. And therefore looked upon themselves in all Ver. 37.
these things, as more than Conquerors through him that Loved them.

Thirdly: The like Reason not only 3.
regards the Sufferer, but all others who are Witnesses and Spectators of their Sufferings; that they may see the Advantages of Religion above all other Supports and Consolations, how useful and effectual it is, not only to illustrate and adorn the most fortunate and splendid Scenes of Man's Life, but likewise to dispel all the Clouds, and to remove all the Scandals of the more prosperous Part, and to enrich every Paragraph of Religious History with the solid and substantial Praises of those who can resign themselves to God's Will

under all Contingencies. It is for the good of others to see these Dispensations of Providence towards the *Great* especially, because their *Examples* are *imitable* in all other Particulars, but in their humble *Resignation* to the *Divine Will*.

Thus much of the Reasons relating to this Consideration; That GOD afflicts sometimes those whom he loves, which was the *First* Particular. I proceed to the

II. *Second*: That his *absenting* or seeming to withdraw himself from his Favourites is not of any long Continuance. *I am returned*, which Word *am*, tho' it hath a *present* Sense, yet it may perhaps here signifie a *future*, but withall, a sudden Return of Mercies, as if he had said, *I will quickly return*.

For tho' it seems to look upon the present, yet we must take it in a Prophetick Style; the Prophet here speaks in the Person of GOD, with whom there is no Distinction of Time; but an Eternal *now*; and says, *I am returned*, denoting the Speediness and the Certainty of
GOD'S

GOD's returning with mercies. — It is said, that *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men.* If so, then (with Reverence be it spoke) he is uneasy under our Afflictions; it may be said, because the Prophet so expresses it, *Isa. lxiii. 9. In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saved them. Like as a Father (saith the Psalmist) pitieth his Children, even so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* Of this we have passionate Expressions likewise in *Jer. xxxi. 20. Is Ephraim my dear Son? is he a pleasant Child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.*

GOD ALMIGHTY obliges not Himself to the Formalities and Puncto's of Secular Grandeur: The Fountain of Honour can never be impoverish'd or impaired by making the first Overtures of Tenderness and Reconciliation, he valued himself always upon a voluntary Propensity to Love. *Herein is Love, (saith St. John) not that* 1 Ep. iv. 10
we

we Loved him, but that he first Loved us; and that while we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us. He who is the Wisest, knows best the dreadful Consequences of Enmity and Disagreement, between God and Man; He is readiest therefore to forgive all that is past; He is in greatest Hast for an Accommodation; He Condescends much to our Infirmities, *for He knows our frame, and He remembers that we are but dust:* He is Jealous for our Good; He is afraid lest we should be tempted above that we 1 Cor. viii. 13. *are able, and therefore with the temptation also he will make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.* 'Tis His Nature and Property, saith Holy Church, to have Mercy and to Forgive; and therefore, well may it be, That all the Dispensations of his Providence towards Men, have a natural Tendency to this Eternal Center; That He hath a perpetual Inclination to shine out upon us, and that whenever he withdraws himself, it is but for a while, which was the *Second Consideration.* The

Third

Third and Last is; That when He doth Return 'tis with all the Tenders of Love and Compassion. *I am returned to Jerusalem with Mercies. Miserationibus!* There is Energy in the Number saith *Drusus*; Not with Forgiveness only, or any one Species, but with all the Instances of Mercy. Thus in *Isai.* liv. 7. *For a small Moment have I forsaken thee, but with great Mercies will I gather thee.* III.

As if it were with GOD as with tender and Compassionate Kindred and Friends: Misunderstanding one another is like the stopping of a Stream; but when the Difficulty is conquer'd, and all Obstacles are removed, 'tis as when the Flood-Gates of Amity are open'd, there's a Torrent of Affection running down like a mighty Stream, the strong Passion of Love, that hath unwillingly been kept in so long, and labour'd under its Confinement, surmounts now all Difficulties, and as Ointment pour'd forth, it fills all a-round with insuperable charming Sweets. Such is the *Fountain of Gardens, the Well of living*

living waters, the Streams of Libanon, wherewith God refreshes and makes glad the Hearts of those that love Him. O happy *Discord* that produces such *Harmony*! that begets such an Union! O Light Affliction that worketh for us a far more Exceeding and Eternal Weight of Glory! O the Mysteriousness of Divine Love, that can *augment* it self by a *Diminution*, that can *enrich* it self by its own *Wants*! So it is when God returns to any People, or particular Person in Mercies.

Nor doth it at all interfere with his Constancy and Justice, because it always supposes Conditions perform'd; at least in his Fore-knowledge, that his Mercy will move us to Repentance; upon which Account His Mercy is sometimes term'd His Justice. *If we confess our Sins*, saith St. John, *he is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* He is faithful and just, that is, He is never failing in his Mercies; His Mercy never obstructs his Justice, but all his Attributes are one simple Essence, and proceed in an Eternal and

1 Ep. i. 9.

and Unchangeable Method; as they are Constant and never failing; so are they infinite; they are not circumscribed within any Limits, but extended through all Ages, and unto all Persons, according to their Exigencies and Necessities; the exceeding Riches of his Grace are as necessary for the *Rich* as for the *Poor*, the *Learned* many times stand in as much need of Divine Knowledge as the *ignorant*; the light of his Countenance is as refreshing to the *most Illustrious* as to the *most obscure*.

Nay, if any are more in need than others, 'tis they who cannot be themselves, without a more than ordinary Supply of Divine Assistance. If the *Great* are exposed to greater Dangers than the mean; if those that are born to *Govern* the World, are to be so much the more sublime in their *Understanding*, by how much they are placed in a higher Station; and they who are to be the greatest *Lights* in the World, are always to be most conspicuous in the World's Eye. If they are most to be cherish'd and protected; in whose Life and Happiness,

D

pinels Mankind is most concerned; Then these are the Objects upon whom, when the Blessing and Mercies of Heaven shine, the Author and Giver of them all is for ever to be adored.

And blessed be His Holy Name for the late and all other his Mercies bestowed upon us and our *Jerusalem*.

I have now to add a Word or two of Application, and shall Conclude.

The *Protestant Churches in France* have for many Years resembled the desolate Condition of the *Jews* at the Time of this Prophecy, and for their sakes, we, as well as they, wait in hope of a sure and happy Deliverance in God's good time; and that he will make our Gracious and Victorious QUEEN the happy Instrument (if it seems good to the Divine Will) of compassing that blessed End; In the mean time, The *Jerusalem* here in my Text, we would be willing to apply to our own *Church and Nation*, who have had our Share in the publick Dangers of *Christendom*, that God is Covenanting with us, and that if we will

will turn unto Him, He is willing to return unto us *with Mercies*. I need not say we are Objects of Mercy, and that the former Dangers and Difficulties we have of late Years gone through, (that came neither from the East nor from the West, but from Domestick-Lusts which war in our Members) have been helped forwards by those Enemies to the present Government, who have not only been unconcerned at the *Afflictions of Joseph*, but who are insensible of any Dangers which affect the *Protestant* Interest in general. But, if to the Sorrow of such Men, the *Royal Family* is, as I hope, upon the last Settlement, still preserved from private Assassinations and publick Violences: If the *Church* is still secure from the Inundations of *Papery* and *Enthusiasm*. If *Victories* by *Land* and *Sea*, and *Tranquility* at Home, are any Instances of God's Mercies, then have we Reason to believe, That *He will be gracious unto our Zion, and build up the Walls of our Jerusalem,*

We have Reason to believe, upon the present Appearance of God's Providence towards us, That all the Returns which he makes to our Vows, and Prayers, and Thanksgivings, are *in Mercy*.

Witness these late great *Victories*, or *Deliverances* shall I call them? with which God hath visited us *in Mercies*.

That they were *Victories*, and Great Ones, the whole World must own; but how greatly they were *Deliverances* too, and what a desperate Condition we and all *Europe* had been in, without these merciful *Deliverances* from the Hand of God, is too melancholy a Subject to insist upon at this time.

Now, what have we to do, but to take care that the Return of our Sins do not hinder the Progress of the Good QUEEN'S Arms? No, rather, that as in the midst of *Dangers* greater than we are willing, perhaps to own God hath returned to us, even before we returned to Him, so since he hath made the first Overtures of Love, Let us return from the Evil of our Ways, and with greater Hast than ever, and more Sincerity, run to meet Him

Him at His Mercies-Seat; Then every one of us, who live at Home in Rest and Peace, may have our Share in Fight and Victory too, I mean the *Triumphs of Faith*, that *Victory which overcomes the World*.

That *Faith*, of which one single Instance in the Person of our Gracious SOVEREIGN, hath been rewarded with a greater Mercy still, than any I have hinted at, a merciful Dispensation of greater *Conquest*; I mean that intire One, which Her Sacred MAJESTY enjoys over the Hearts and Affections of a People, otherwise the most discontented, repining, murmuring Factionous, perhaps upon the Face of the Earth.

And who knows but that GOD ALMIGHTY seeing us now, (and never before it may be,) united in a dutiful Love and Affection to our SOVEREIGN; hath poured forth the Abundance of His Mercy towards us, to shew the People of this Nation, That if we would stand by, and round about our Pious MONARCH, and link'd Hand in Hand together, Concenter in Our Duty;

That

That the ALMIGHTY GOD Himself would then be over us, and overshadow us, and espouse our Cause, and Fight our Battles; and not only *return* to us in Mercies, but *abide* with us; and not only make us a *happy* People as to this World, but a *holy* People in reference to a happier World after this.

That He will not acquiesce in any single Dispensation of His Mercy, but return to us with all those Blessings and more, which, whenever we were any ways qualified for them, have made this Nation, I will not say the *Envy*, but the *Joy* of the whole Earth.

In order to which, Let not us rest in the Performance of any one single Precept of the Gospel, but *Giving all diligence, add to your Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and to Brotherly Kindness, Charity.*

For let us *Lastly* Consider, That if the Mercies of God are to us-ward so great, How ought we to be tender and

com-

2 Pet. i. 5,
6, 7.

compassionate one towards another? *for-
giving one another, even as God for* Eph. iv. 32.
Christs sake hath forgiven us.

Let none of those invidious Distin-
ctions remain, with which the Ene-
mies of the *Church of England* seek
to divide us, who our selves, are of
the same Faith and Discipline, which
Divine Precepts and Apostolical Tradi-
tion, hath consecrated and transmit-
ted to our Use, and which hath long
been Establish'd, and now stands so by
Law of most August Authority: But
let us with Constancy to our own Prin-
ciples, recall in the Spirit of Meek-
ness, such as err therefrom.

And however we may at any time
be justly incensed by fresh Provocations
of those turbulent Spirits which cannot
be charm'd with Indulgence; yet let us
never faint in our Endeavours after
Peace and Unity, but to that wise End
Put on therefore (as the elect of God, Col. iii. 12.
*holy and beloved) bowels of Mercy, Kind-
ness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness,
and Long-suffering.*

And

And now the GOD of Peace Himself, give you Peace always, by all means, through the Merits and Intercession of CHRIST JESUS our LORD, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour, Praise, Glory, world without end. Amen.



F I N I S